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# Communist Press in Japan: Exposes and Comic Strips

BY SAM JAMESON

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TOKYO—Tadao Nirasawa prides himself on the fact that his newspaper appeals to the very young, a 3-year-old who follows the comics, and to the very old, a 97-year-old subscriber.

"We want our paper to be one that can be enjoyed by anyone from children to grandparents," he said.

He also is proud that his paper carries what he calls "the most accurate fishing information" in Japan.

He points with pride to his newspaper's many exposes—including a recent revelation that the General Petroleum Co. issued a directive to its dealers calling the oil crisis "a chance of a lifetime" to increase profits.

Nirasawa's views of news and editing sound typical of any editor's, but the 50-year-old Nirasawa is not a typical editor.

He runs what has become Japan's most successful weekly publishing venture, the 2.2 million-circulation Sunday Akahata (Red Flag). It is the official organ of the Japan Communist Party.

As far as a weekly publication is concerned, it has no peer in Japan. Its closest competitor, the Komei Shinbun newspaper) Sunday edition put out by the neo-Buddhist Clean Government Party, claims a 1.4 million circulation. Among general circulation weeklies, the top circulation is 700,000.

Although Red Flag has both daily and Sunday editions like all general circulation newspapers, the Communist organ is edited and circulated as two separate operations. Nirasawa heads a separate staff of 30 that works exclusively on the Sunday edition and the 2.2 million circulation for the Sunday Red Flag represents a vastly expanded audience from the 500,000 who subscribe to the daily newspaper.

If compared to Japan's national general newspapers—whose circulations range as high as the Daily Asahi's 6.2 million—the

ranks neck and neck with the Chunichi Shinbun of Nagoya as Japan's number four newspaper regardless whether daily on Sunday.

It is a far cry from pre-World War II days when the then-outlawed Communist Party was forced to surreptitiously publish Red Flag on extremely thin paper—so anyone in danger of being found with it could eat it," Nirasawa said.

It's also a far cry from Moscow's Pravda or Peking's People's Daily.

"Japan is a country with papers with millions in circulation publishing daily and printing vast quantities of news. To compete with the general newspapers here, we cannot afford to be as lackadaisical as newspapers in the Soviet Union or China. They are countries in which newspapers were not highly developed. We don't think we have much to learn from them," said Nirasawa.

The Sunday Red Flag started in 1959 with a readership of 30,000.

Today it boasts the greatest readership of any Communist organ in the capitalist world, with Italy's L'Unita (circulation: 500,000) a distant second.

The Communists, however, are not resting on their oars.

On April 1, Red Flag opened two new printing plants—in Aomori in northern Honshu and in Nagoya—to give it a nationwide network of six plants.

Although Red Flag has by no means dissolved anti-American, anti-capitalistic ideology from its pages, the newspaper—particularly the Sunday edition—has, under Nirasawa, become a brightly edited, hard-hitting, and often humorous newspaper. It seems to be trying to prove to its readers (not more than a fifth of whom are party members) that communism can be fun—or at least readable.

Communist candidates upper house of parliament this summer are being plugged heavily in Red

But elsewhere in the paper are comic strips, reviews of books, movies and TV shows, guest columns written by non-Communist stars of the entertainment world, news for children, special interest news for farmers, and features on taxes, bowling and fishing.

Perhaps most significant of all is Red Flag's emphasis on exposes, a rarity in Japanese journalism.

The revelation that General Petroleum Co. had sent out the "chance of a lifetime" bid for bigger profits to its dealers was just one example.

The paper also reported that a giant milk firm was marketing milk that had been thinned down with coconut oil, that the Japan national railways was demanding a passenger fare increase despite the fact that the only portion of its business which was running in the red was its freight service, and that Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka was keeping a mistress.

The attack on Tanaka was a particular source of pride to Nirasawa.

"Right after Tanaka came back from his trip to China (during which he established diplomatic relations with Peking)—at a time when he enjoyed a 60% popularity rating in polls—we exposed the fact that he had utilized his earlier position as finance minister to build a house for his mistress," Nirasawa said. "Since then, his popularity has plunged to below 20%."

(Tanaka, later questioned by a Communist in parliament, denied the charge of improper use of his official position.)

Handling of exposes, Nirasawa admitted freely, is coordinated with the party's headquarters and the party's delegation in parliament for maximum political effect.

So many exposes have appeared in the Sunday Red Flag that the newspaper has become required reading for ruling party politicians and big businessmen throughout the country.

"Our reporters have come to be called 'bros-

ident kings. If a businessman's name gets published in Red Flag, his head rolls quickly. We have even heard that companies have called their boards of directors into special sessions just because one of our reporters dropped by to pick up a handout," Nirasawa said.

He was speaking with only slight exaggeration.

Mitsubishi Trading Co., it was learned from a source in that firm, has virtually abolished the practice of keeping written records of company meetings as a result of the Communist exposes.

Has the Communist Party succeeded in planting informers in big business? Nirasawa wasn't revealing.

But he pointed to the network of some 13,000 "special correspondents" throughout the country, whose names are registered with Red Flag, as one of the keys to the newspaper's success. All of them are amateur reporters or photographers who hold other jobs and send in "the tiniest reports from the farthest corners of Japan" to Red Flag free of charge.

The newspaper compensates the special correspondents only for the materials they use—film, paper or postage.

Red Flag also enjoys a circulation staff that is the envy of the general newspapers in Japan. Of the party's more than 300,000 claimed members, 50,000 deliver the daily edition and virtually all party members chip in to deliver the Sunday edition, Nirasawa said.

He did not mention it, but the excuse of delivering newspapers also enables Communist Party "newsboys" to double as campaigners at election time in making house-to-house calls which Japanese election laws prohibit.

Circulation of the Red Flag "is one of the party's main activities," Nirasawa said.

Much of the Communist Party's political funds (\$18.8 million in 1973

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